

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A data providing apparatus comprising:
  - an input unit which inputs printing data;
  - a setting unit which sets a selection condition;
  - 5 an acquiring unit which is connected to a network, and acquires a plurality of status information concerning a plurality of image forming apparatuses on the network;
  - a selection unit which calculates evaluation of
  - 10 said plurality of image forming apparatuses on the basis of the selection condition and said plurality of status information, and selects one image forming apparatus according to calculation result; and
  - a transfer unit which transfers the printing data
  - 15 input by the input unit in order to provide the printing data to said one image forming apparatus selected by the selection unit.
2. A data providing apparatus according to claim 1, wherein the selection unit determines the
- 20 calculation results by also referring to specifications of the printing data input by the input unit.
3. A data providing apparatus according to claim 1, wherein the selection condition which is
- 25 considered by the selection unit is at least one of a distance from the data providing apparatus to the image forming apparatus, printing time of the image forming apparatus, and stability of printing processing of the

image forming apparatus.

4. A data providing apparatus according to claim 1, further comprising:

5 a setting unit which sets a priority concerning the distance from the data providing apparatus to the image forming apparatus, the printing time of the image forming apparatus, and the stability of the printing processing of the image forming apparatus, which are of the selection condition.

10 5. A data providing apparatus according to claim 4, wherein a user can arbitrarily set a value of the priority of the setting unit.

6. A data providing apparatus according to claim 1, wherein the distance from the data providing apparatus to the image forming apparatus, which is one of the selection conditions of the selection unit, is the value set by the user.

7. A data providing apparatus according to claim 1, wherein the selection condition of the setting unit includes the printing time of the image forming apparatus, and the printing time is a printing schedule time calculated in consideration of paper, the number of printing sheets, a printing mode, which are specified by the printing data, and said plurality of status information of said plurality of image forming apparatuses of the network.

8. A data providing apparatus according to

claim 1, wherein the selection condition of the setting unit includes the stability of the printing processing of the image forming apparatus, and the stability is determined on the basis of how many the image forming apparatus has generated an error during a predetermined period in the past.

9. A data providing apparatus according to claim 1, wherein the calculation result of the selection unit is determined in consideration of whether the image forming apparatus can process a task shown by the printing data or not.

10. A data providing apparatus according to claim 1, wherein the calculation of the evaluation of the selection unit is performed not only to each of said plurality of image forming apparatuses, but also to a plurality of ports which are included in the image forming apparatus.

11. A data providing method comprising:

acquiring a plurality of status information concerning a plurality of image forming apparatuses on a network;

setting a selection condition for selecting one image forming apparatus from said plurality of image forming apparatuses in order to print given printing data;

calculating evaluation of said plurality of image forming apparatuses on the basis of the selection

condition and said plurality of status information, and selecting one image forming apparatus according to calculation result; and

transferring the printing data in order to provide  
5 the printing data to the selected image forming apparatus.

12. A data providing method according to claim 11, wherein the calculation processing for the selection is performed by also referring to specifications of the  
10 printing data input by the input unit.

13. A data providing method according to claim 11, wherein the selection condition is at least one of a distance from the data providing method to the image forming apparatus, printing time of the image forming  
15 apparatus, and stability of printing processing of the image forming apparatus.

14. A data providing method according to claim 11, further comprising:

setting a priority concerning the distance from  
20 the data providing apparatus to the image forming apparatus, the printing time of the image forming apparatus, and the stability of the printing processing of the image forming apparatus, which are of the selection condition.

25 15. A data providing method according to claim 14, wherein a user can arbitrarily set a value of the priority.

16. A data providing method according to claim 11, wherein the distance from the data providing method to the image forming apparatus, which is of the selection condition, is one whose value is set by the user.

5        17. A data providing method according to claim 11, wherein the selection condition includes the printing time of the image forming apparatus, and the printing time is a printing schedule time calculated in consideration of paper, the number of printing sheets,  
10        and a printing mode, which are specified by the printing data, and said plurality of status information of the network.

18. A data providing method according to claim 11, wherein the selection condition includes the stability  
15        of the printing processing of the image forming apparatus, and the stability is determined on the basis of how many the image forming apparatus has  
..... generated an error during a predetermined period in the past.

20        19. A data providing method according to claim 11, wherein the calculation result is determined in consideration of whether the image forming apparatus can process a task shown by the printing data or not.

25        20. A data providing method according to claim 11, wherein the calculation processing for the evaluation is performed not only to each of said plurality of image forming apparatuses, but also to a plurality of

ports which are included in the image forming apparatus.